

BLOOD BEAST #1

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**Aliens!
Freaks!
Bigfoot!
Weird Science!
Tentacles!
Radiation!
Voodoo!
and more!**

Red Weed Press

Blood Beast #1 | Mad Monster Movie Reviews and Beyond!
 October 2023 | Written and published by Stephen Jilks
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Reviews: **THE MUTATIONS, THE STRANGENESS, BLOOD FREAK, THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS, WOMANEATER, THE CREEPING TERROR, MONSTER A-GO GO, NIGHT FRIGHT, THE NIGHT CALLER, THE DARK, TEENAGERS BATTLE THE THING, THE GEEK, THE BLOOD BEAST TERROR, THE VULTURE, HOWLING II, AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON XXX, RAWHEAD REX, PAGANINI HORROR**

Dante's Inferno - Dawn and Development of the Bad Movie List

Although the intention of *Blood Beast* is to riff on the style of the 1980s horror fanzines, the concept of the questionable monster/horror movie as reference list and guide can be traced back to the early years of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. Since its inception in 1958, an eleven-year-old New Jersey kid called Joe Dante obsessed over Forrest J. Ackerman's magazine. Fruitlessly firing off letters to get his name in print, Dante changed tactics. He sent a take on the fifty best horror movies, but to no avail. Dante then wrote about the fifty worst horror movies he ever saw, which was published. Appearing in *Famous Monsters* #18 (July 1962), 'Dante's Inferno' was a landmark event, not just for the future director, but for how bad movies could be presented and enter a larger psyche. These cynical snippets paved the way for everything from the Medved books (*The 50 Worst Films of All Time*, *Golden Turkey Awards*) to the Razzies.

In his 1986 reflection book *Famous Monster of Filmland* from Imagine, Ackerman writes about the repercussions the piece caused. Publisher Jim Warren irately told him American International's president James H. Nicholson was fuming, as AIP was planning to reissue a few of the titles ridiculed in the article. Warren flatly told Ackerman to never run criticism of another picture, as it would threaten the support of production companies. Consequently, in *Famous Monsters* #20 (November 1962), Nicholson



was calmed when the magazine ran a photo of a large trophy sitting on his desk, the first *Famous Monsters of Filmland* Producer's Award for "the horror hit of 1962" - AIP's Roger Corman/Edgar Allan Poe classic **THE PIT & THE PENDULUM**.

Shrouded by increased American political unrest and violence, the first true splatter film was made in 1963 - Herschel Gordon Lewis' **BLOOD FEAST**. *Famous Monsters* never embraced this trend, and the original run gasped its last in 1983. The Monster Kids of the 1960s had mutated into The Horror/Gore Kids of the 1970s and 80s, who had their own bible, *Fangoria*, since 1979. Ackerman had published Dick Smith's *The Do-It-Yourself Monster Make-Up Handbook* in 1965, and *Fangoria* built on this with regular articles on special make-up artists akin to hero worship, many of whom were Smith acolytes.

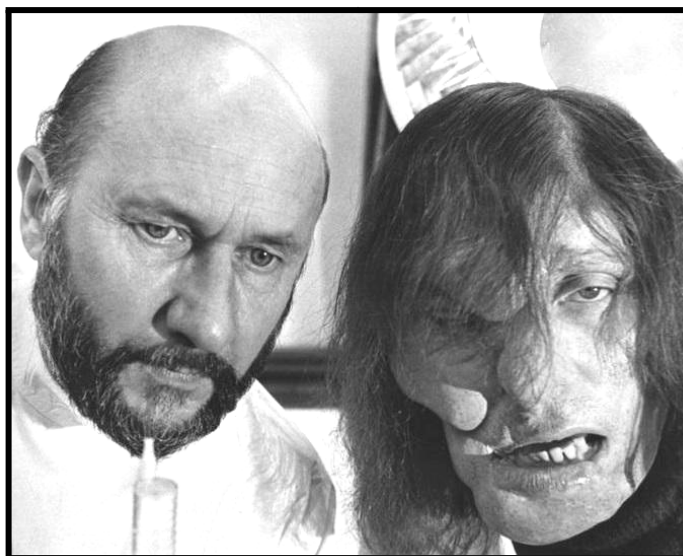
Once too easily dismissed by mainstream critics, vintage creature features are now endlessly critiqued, watched by both wry and cultural eyes. Coverage has constantly evolved, from magazines, fanzines, blogs, discussion boards and YouTube reviews. But such sensational narratives have been the bedrock of cinema since its creation, and this tide of terror feeds our need for novel experiences. Stimulated by alternative realities in the comfort of the theatre, or in front of a television or computer screen, sometimes bad is better.

THE MUTATIONS

(GB/US, 1974,
Cyclone/Getty, 92 mins)

The exhibition of real biological oddities can be traced back to the 1630s, when Lazarus Colloredo and his conjoined twin Joannes Baptista toured Europe. Using actual "freaks of nature" as a source of entertainment on film adds another voyeuristic quality, freezing their façade awkwardly in time to watch over and over. The January 1932 original cut of Tod Browning's **FREAKS** was met with disgust - one woman at a test screening threatened to sue stating it caused her miscarriage - and remains the only MGM release to have been pulled from circulation before completing its engagements. The picture was also banned in Britain for thirty years, and effectively brought Browning's career to a premature end. Yet **FREAKS** has enjoyed a positive re-evaluation over the years, unlike Michael Winner's 1977 Universal opus **THE SENTINEL**, which also controversially featured deformed humans as denizens from hell, or the genuine freaks hiding out in Maury Dexter's 1963 **HOUSE OF THE DAMNED**.

Directed by Oscar-winning cinematographer Jack Cardiff, **THE MUTATIONS** mixes **FREAKS** with further unsubtle sleaze and an avant-garde score. University Professor Nolter (Donald Pleasence, in a role intended for Vincent Price) is experimenting to merge human and plant life. Any unsuccessful subjects are offloaded to Nolter's kidnapping accomplice Lynch (Tom Baker) for a nearby circus which Lynch runs with dwarf Burns (Michael Dunn). The human protagonists - all students from Nolter's class (Tony (Scott Anthony), Lauren (Jill Haworth) and Hedi (Julie Ege)) - and the circus freaks are exploited by Lynch, who hopes that Nolter will cure his own deformity. The plan starts to unravel when Tony, after being turned into a human Venus Fly Trap, escapes and ingests a homeless man. With Hedi strapped naked to the operating table, she is saved from Nolter's burning mansion by Dr Brian Redford



(Brad Harris), and the "special people" take their own savage revenge on the tyrannical Lynch.

Here, the real deformed humans include Alligator Girl Esther Blackmon and the showstopping Willie "Popeye" Ingram. Of the "regular" cast a deadpan Pleasence mostly recites dialogue from his textbooks and provides an amusing lecture aside referencing genetically

recreated dinosaurs, while at home he feeds rabbits to his creations. But Baker is the true star of the movie: shortly before his Time Lord appointment - and sporting a coat, hat and scarf ensemble - Lynch is the Igor to Pleasence's Frankenstein/Dr Moreau. Lynch's self loathing cannot make himself accept his plight; in the film's only touching scene, he visits a prostitute and begs her to say "I love you" for an extra pound. Amid **THE MUTATIONS** relentless dour atmosphere, when Lynch is killed by flying switchblades then devoured by Nolter's hounds, the freaks at least have some form of closure.



More soberly, the amusement park used in the film is Battersea Fun Fair, which operated from 1951 until the release year of **THE MUTATIONS**. Its demise was hastened by the deaths of five juveniles in May 1972, in the infamous Big Dipper accident. It was discovered that, after a fire damaged the ride in 1970, second-hand stock had been applied to key elements of the carriages, especially the dog brake.

THE STRANGENESS

(US, 1980, Stellarwind, 93 mins)

"Where most nightmares end the strangeness begins." Issued straight to VHS in the UK and America, **THE STRANGENESS** belongs to an early 1980s trilogy of mining-based horrors, together with wider known tentacled turtle terror **THE BOOGENS**, and polished slasher **MY BLOODY VALENTINE**. Shot for around \$20,000 by friends over weekends, this cult curio is far better than it has any reason to be, with production values which verge on the miraculous: the underground set was actually built in a backyard and garage ("for a mine it sure looks like a cave"), and a stop-motion monster is the main draw.

Within the desolate Gold Spike mine, our group of underutilised, eclectic characters unsurprisingly don't gel, either getting on each other's nerves, or engaging in endless conversations that you can't wait for them to be devoured by the lurking beast. In an **ALIEN**/Ash type role, engineer Hemmings (Rolf Theison) is only interested in the possibility of ore and/or gold, and certainly not the welfare of his two consultants Calvert (Dan Lunham) and Ruggles (Chris Huntley). We can tell that Angela (Diane Borcyckowski) is a veteran geologist because she can point a magnifying glass at a wall and sniff rocks. Also present are photographer Cindy (Terri Berland) and writer partner Dan Flanders (Mark Sawicki), who is researching the locale. Flanders hopes that there is truth to the rumours about Indian grounds protected by a vengeful god who hates white



people. This demon is apparently responsible for cave-ins, missing persons, and other tragedies dating back to 1883. Completing our exploratory team is British-born Morgan (Keith Hurt), a hired hand due to his knowledge of the tunnels (hardly acting like a grizzled pro, and sometimes sounding Australian).

Sawicki and Huntley met at USC film school, and created the underground monster themselves. Although the filmmakers state they didn't consider its symbolic design, it's basically a tentacled phallus with a vagina head (think **ALIEN**'s Xenomorph meets **DOCTOR WHO**'s Fendahl), and the initial design also had an unwieldy-looking translucent sac attached to its back. When you can see through the low-level lighting, the shock value isn't limited to the creature; there are numerous bloodied limbs banded around and - in a scare that could be generously linked to **ALIEN**'s deleted cocoon sequence - Ruggles is discovered drenched in monster-goo and oozing white foam from his mouth (an effect achieved with the use of boiled corn starch).

THE STRANGENESS was directed by another USC *alumni* David Michael Hillman, who would transition to writer and philosopher Melanie Anne Phillips. More padding than film, one has to admire everyone involved in getting the job done. For all its flatness, the passages of banality are interspersed by flashes ranging from stereotypical (corny dialogue such as "where is that wind coming from? Straight from the pits of hell, the evil lives!") to artful (previous miners have left a room of glass shards to alert them to impending danger). But the film will always be remembered for its creature, which was affectionately referred to as Binky by the crew, and made a noise on screen by mixing cat and pig vocalisations. It's a warped, sexual image that is another link to Ridley Scott's picture, where the Xenomorph itself exists as a sexual image and device for interspecies violation.

BLOOD FREAK

(US, 1972, Sampson, 86 mins)

Written, produced and directed by Brad F. Ginter and Steve Hawkes, Hawkes also plays our star Herschell, a Vietnam vet and plank of wood who wants to be Elvis and Peter Fonda.

The film begins when he helps Christian girl Angel (Heather Hughes) with some car trouble ("a pretty girl with a problem; who could resist?") Angel introduces Herschell to her sexpot sister Ann (Dana Cullivan) at a middle-aged drug party, who seduces him and turns him on to marijuana. When our rugged hero meets poultry farmer Mr Nolan (Bob Currier), he is offered a job involving two very suspect-looking scientists. Asked to eat one whole turkey that has been treated with special preservatives, Herschell awakens from a seizure with a turkey head and a thirst for the blood of drug addicts. But Ann is not ready to give up on her hunk just because of a few feathers, a beak and a blood lust; even though she says to her drug dealer that "It's weird; It's like out of STAR TREK or THE TWILIGHT ZONE," she groundedly sighs, wondering what their children would be like. As he literally goes cold turkey and prays to God, the murder spree and transformation has actually been a hallucination, his system addled by both the experimental poultry and his own substance abuse.

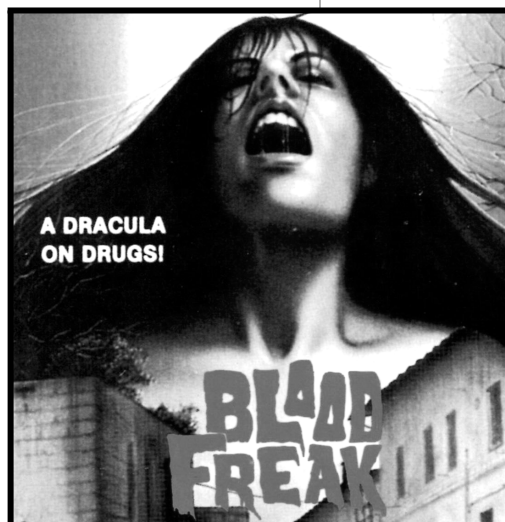
Part Christian propaganda, part anti-drugs campaign, but all bonkers, **BLOOD FREAK's** disjointed take on values and violence may well have been created from initial financiers pulling out (the gore highlight has a real life amputee bringing realism to the leg sawing scene, but this is nothing compared to the generally upsetting inclusion of an actual turkey decapitation). Ginter also appears on screen as a Criswell type narrator, delivering straight to camera sermons on fate, salvation and drugs. Chain smoking and constantly referring to his script, a final segment culminates in a bizarre coughing fit. Most optimistically, **BLOOD FREAK** can be witnessed as a prime example of



1970s exploitation stupidity - Hawkes referred to it as a "sad chapter" in his life - but basically exists in a genre of its own (Christian Grindhouse?).

Both Ginter and Hawkes have interesting back stories. Ginter had earlier made **FLESH FEAST**, where a Florida Nazi ring is in possession of Hitler's body, and he knew socially Herschell Gordon Lewis, who cast him in the nudie cutie **HOW TO MAKE A DOLL** (and our "hero" here is named after The Godfather of Gore). Hawkes was actually a Croatian-born immigrant called Steven Sipek, starring

in a couple of Spanish-language Tarzan rip-offs and some Miami Joe Sarno erotica. During the making of **TARZAN AND THE BROWN PRINCE**, Hawkes was badly burned in an on-set fire, his life saved by a lion who had been trained to remove the actor's restraints in the scene. Because of this Hawkes vowed to open an animal sanctuary; however, his Palm Beach complex made the news for the wrong reasons when a Bengal tiger escaped, and his animals were later confiscated due to permit irregularities.



THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS

(US, 1961, Cardoza-Francis, 54 mins)

Born Karl Erik Tore Johansson, Swedish professional wrestler and movie actor Tor Johnson played a number of dim-witted monsters, while leaving his more polished performances for the sporting arena. Tor is best remembered for his association with Ed Wood Jr, appearing as Lobo, the mute assistant to Bela Lugosi in **BRIDE OF THE MONSTER**, squeezing into a suit to play Inspector Clay for **PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE**, and reprising his Lobo role in **NIGHT OF THE GHOULS**. 1977 saw Don Post Studios released a top-selling Tor mask which, in the tradition of William Shatner and **HALLOWEEN**, was a visage used by one of the murderers in the 1981 sleeper hit **STRANGE BEHAVIOUR**. And in a suitably quirky turn, Johnson's death certificate and grave list 1903 as his year of birth, which contradicts published genealogy reports of 19th October 1902.

Written, directed and narrated by Coleman Francis, **THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS** tells of defecting Russian scientist Joseph Javorsky



(Johnson), who is traded by Kremlin spies to a Nevada military base. Wandering into the Yucca Flats desert, an atomic test blast reduces Javorsky to a molten, hulking monster whose only inclination is to kill. This is particularly bad news for

a couple he finds in a broken-down car, and a vacationing family - the Radcliffes - whose two young boys get lost near Joseph's new stomping ground.

The nonsensical voiceover spurts out surreal, beatnik-like phrases ("flag on the moon, how did it get



there?" ... "nothing bothers some people, not even flying saucers" ... "touch a button, things happen: a scientist becomes a beast") and to further the otherworldliness, the picture was shot without live sound with no intention to align audio: everything is set up to cut away before the actors speak, or have them turn away from camera. With lines delivered offscreen and mouths cupped when shouting, any characterisation or suspense is impossible; in fact, the only synchronicity is when Tor growls.

One can say that **THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS** is conclusively worse than anything Tor did for Ed Wood. With the narration rambling on about the wheels of progress leading civilization to a collective doom, this underlying theme of man's inhumanity to man is lost in all the hypnotically awful execution: The Beast strangles a woman in her bedroom as a pre-credits sequence, before any of the story is set in motion; officer Jim Archer (Bing Stafford) attempts to shoot The Beast from a plane, unable to differentiate between the four hundred-pound mutated scientist and the slim Mr Radcliffe (Douglas Mellor); after surviving a bullet wound Mr Radcliffe runs back to his car, only to leave his wife stranded; and a dying Javorsky gently grasps at a baby jackrabbit, only because it had suddenly hopped into frame.

The Radcliffe's themselves also seem dysfunctional. Francis cast his two sons Ronald and Alan as the children, who at one point feed soda pop to pigs. The parents can't even get their names right: the father refers to them as Mike and Randy, while the mother calls them Art and Randy. Online credits reveal that the mother was right.

WOMANEATER

(GB, 1958, Fortress, 70 mins)

Between 1960 and 1967, there were a slew of murderous plant movies: Roger Corman's **LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS** had a florist assistant cultivating flora that feeds on human blood; Howard Keel's version of **DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS** was released; the homicidal creeping vine segment was part of **DR TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS**; specimens of frozen tundra turn into acid-secreting carnivores for **NAVY VS THE NIGHT MONSTERS**; and **MANEATER OF HYDRA** sees Cameron Mitchell play a reclusive scientist crossbreeding dangerous varieties. But the dawn of this subgenre occurred three years earlier in 1957 and 1958, with stories of more exotic origin: Dan Milner's **FROM HELL IT CAME** has a vengeful walking tree from the South Seas; and in this Charles Saunders picture, an Amazonian tribe have a trunk-idol that can resurrect the departed, as long as it is regularly fed with nubile young woman to keep its secretions flowing ("SEE the Woman Eater ensnare the beauties of two continents! SEE its hideous arms devour them in a death-embrace!")

Released in the United States as **THE WOMAN EATER**, even having the tentacled tree that can revive the dead unfortunately can't put any life into this plodding production. Scientist and explorer



James Moran (George Coulouris) transports the aforementioned "miracle-working Ju Ju" back to his English estate with loin-clothed Tanga (Jimmy Vaughn), who drums potential victims into a hypnotic state in a basement laboratory. Housekeeper and former lover to Moran, Margaret (Joyce Gregg), becomes resentful to new recruit Sally Norton (Vera Day), an attractive ex-funfair



worker who has started a relationship with mechanic Jack Venner (Peter Wayn). The scientist inadvertently strangles Margaret, who fleetingly returns as a brainless zombie; it is revealed that Tanga has kept the full secret of the tree to himself and his people, in that it revives "only the body, not the mind!"

WOMANEATER has the feel of a ponderous Bela Lugosi/Monogram film from the 1940s, and is a tired attempt to hang on to voodoo as an undead trope (we were still ten years away from George A. Romero reinventing this particular brand). The laboured script is played out by a disinterested and underdeveloped cast: the police force is unbelievably wooden and Coulouris - whose acting career spanned everything from **CITIZEN KANE** to **BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB** - stares blankly under a weight of research and family insanity ("several of them have been sent away.") Moran's plan is clearly at an early stage - he is having to kill people to revive them - but the most ludicrous notion is why Tanga has spun the situation to waste so much time, particularly as his prized idol burns over the closing credits.

For all its bubbling beakers, voluptuous victims and jungle stereotyping, there is no inspiration to elevate **WOMANEATER** above its exploitative title. As Chris Wood states in his excellent British Horror Films website, "it's a film with no bite (although quite a lot of bark)."

THE CREEPING TERROR

(US, 1964, Metropolitan, 74 mins)



In 1959, Arthur Nelson White wrote, produced and starred (using his acting name Vic Savage) in **STREET FIGHTER**, a semi-autobiographical tale of teenage delinquency. Over the next five years, White produced, directed and edited (using his filmmaking name A. J. Nelson) **THE CREEPING TERROR**, also appearing as Deputy Sheriff Martin Gordon.

In the fictional Angel County, an alien slug - which resembles a shambling carpet - dispatches a housewife, a fishing grandfather and his grandson, and most of a military special unit; major raids are also carried out at a picnic and a dancehall. Another of the species is discovered tethered in their spaceship, the duo "mobile" laboratories designed to consume humans in the name of research.

It is rumoured that the shambolic monster was a replacement for a much more impressive creature, which was either stolen a few days before shooting, or taken by its creator when he wasn't paid. The original soundtrack was also

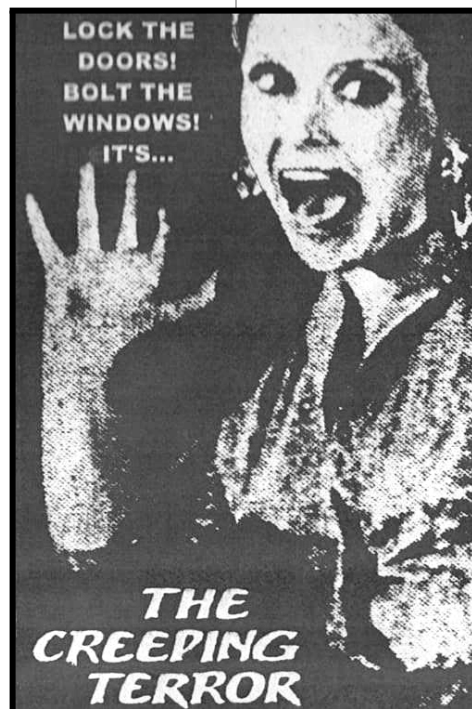
apparently lost, leading to the desperately descriptive narration (another explanation is that this was an always intended cost-cutting measure). To add to this behind the scenes chaos, credited writer Robert Silliphant - from an original story by younger brother Allan - severed ties during production, as not to harm the reputation of his more famous sibling Stirling (who would go on to win an Academy Award for his **IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT** screenplay). White himself disappeared prior to release facing fraud charges, and it was left to financier William Thourlby - who plays Dr Bradford - to salvage the film stock. A large portion of the running time is taken up by showing the creeping carpet slowly approaching its victims. In a notion that would particularly be applicable also to DOCTOR WHO villains, even walking pace would be enough to escape the being, yet time after time characters are struck down

with unfathomable fear (they even have to force feed it head first). Such a warped legacy is underpinned by the 2014 docufilm **THE CREEP BEHIND THE CAMERA** by Pete Schuermann. This nonlinear expose mixes

talking heads and biographic dramatisations to illustrate the deranged life of White (Josh Nelson) who, by all accounts, was a psychotic con-man, wife-abuser and prison escapee. Such a manipulative trail left by this dangerous man does not sit well when considering such a goofy monster movie; White would succumb to liver failure in 1975 aged 42.

On more trivial notes, **THE CREEPING TERROR** was one of the last pictures to be made at Spahn Ranch, which gained infamy as the Manson family residence for much of 1968 and 1969. Amazingly, the credits were created by Richard Edlund, the special effects maestro who

would work on such milestones as **STAR WARS**, **RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK**, **POLTERGEIST** and **GHOSTBUSTERS**.

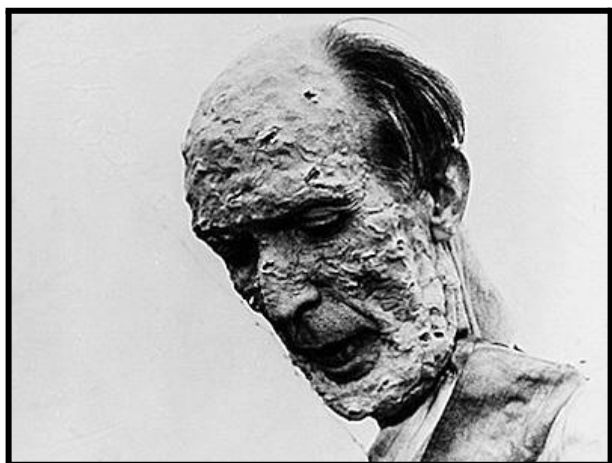


MONSTER A-GO GO

(US, 1965, B. I. & L. Releasing, 68 mins)

Wisconsin *auteur* Bill Rebane started sci-fi picture **TERROR AT HALFDAY** in 1961. Abandoned, the footage was picked up by Herschell Gordon Lewis, who added extra scenes and included new dialogue four years later, unable to gather all of the original cast. This resulted in almost half the characters disappearing midway through the film, to be replaced by others who fill most of the same roles.

American astronaut Frank Douglas (7'6" Henry Hite, best known as the Corn King Giant of the Wilson Certified Meat commercials) mysteriously disappears from his ludicrously small crashed capsule, apparently replaced by a radioactive monster. When the humanoid creature is cornered in the sewers, it too vanishes, but scientists receive a telegram stating that Frank has been rescued in the North Atlantic. Implying that the monster is an alien impersonator, the narrator - voiced by Rebane - concludes that "the line between science fiction and science fact is microscopically thin" and that the viewer has witnessed "the line being shaved even thinner."



To add to the overall disjointed mess, the dialogue is often inaudible, and whole sections of plot are explained without occurring on screen (the capture and subsequent escape of "Douglas", for example). But **MONSTER A-GO GO** enters the realm of the jaw-dropping when a crew member off camera makes a ringing telephone noise to kickstart one scene. As Joe Dante states in his Trailers from Hell critique, "most porno films are made better than this."

NIGHT FRIGHT

(US, 1967, Wallace Clyde Jr, 65 mins)



Test specimens for an experiment into the effects of cosmic radiation on animals are propelled into space on a rocket. When it crashes to Earth in an American rural community, the surviving, mutated creature goes on a rampage, resembling a mix between ogre and gorilla (which leaves alligator-like footprints). Sheriff Clint Crawford (the ever-earnest John Agar) is a busy man, as he has to juggle the attacks, troublesome teenagers, government officials and a lacklustre love affair with nurse Joan Scott (Carol Gilley).

Shot near Dallas, and with a soundtrack by Texas garage band The Wildcats, **NIGHT FRIGHT** is as dull as genre cinema gets, with endless teenager speak and police-based juxtaposition. It's a long lead up to nothing in particular, as the hulking mutant - who is barely visible even when on screen - is eventually blown up. The hip teenagers versus monster fad had been exhausted by the end of the 1950s, and this late 1960s effort's woodland shindig borders on voyeurism, as one particular female bottom comes to the attention of the cameraman, once he gets it in focus.

As a fittingly banal footnote, in 1983 the film was re-released on UK VHS as **E.T.n: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL NASTIE** ("what's 12' tall and eats people") with doctored **E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL** art. As **E.T.** was unavailable on home video and the most requested (and pirated) movie of the time, this particular marketing ploy soon saw Universal threaten legal action and the packaging was hastily withdrawn.

THE DARK

(US, 1979, Film Ventures, 92 mins)



Something is prowling Los Angeles and killing random citizens, either by ripping off their heads or blasting them with eye laser beams (the soundtrack annoys rather

than adds to the tension by using whispering voices repeatedly saying "the darrrk...nessssss"). Writer Roy Warner (William Devane) - the father of the first victim - teams up with news reporter Zoe Owens (Cathy Lee Crosby) to untangle the mystery behind the assailant known as The Mangler, not always assisted by psychic De Renzy (Jacquelyn Hyde) and the police headed by Mooney (Richard Jaeckel).

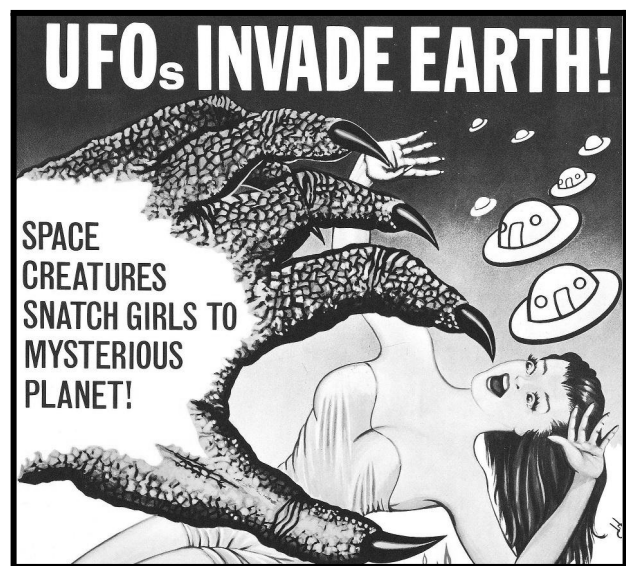
THE DARK has an absurd history. There are conflicting stories of who The Mangler was in the original script: an abused, autistic child, or a zombie-like madman from the novalisation called Harmon Quade. The appearance of the creature in the film matches the description of Quade in the book (grey, rotted face with red sores), but whatever the truth, the killer on screen limps along in blue jeans and looks even wolf-like in closeups. Due to the success of **ALIEN**, during production the powers-that-be insisted in an abrupt turn, changing "him" into an extraterrestrial, which inevitably required extensive reshoots and the apparent need to include a **STAR WARS**-like text crawl to bookend proceedings. And the fun started early: John 'Bud' Cardos replaced director Tobe Hooper three days into shooting, getting Hooper in training to be fired from his next studio picture, **VENOM**.

In his home city of L.A., 7'4" John Bloom portrays the beast, an actor whose major claims to fame is that he remains the tallest actor to ever portray Frankenstein's Monster (in Al Adamson's **DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN**), and was the unfortunate recipient of **THE INCREDIBLE 2-HEADED TRANSPLANT**.

THE NIGHT CALLER

(GB, 1965, Armitage, 85 mins)

This bizarre science fiction/horror hybrid is also known as **THE NIGHT CALLER FROM OUTER SPACE** and **BLOOD BEAST FROM OUTER SPACE**. Directed by John Gilling, just before his Hammer "Cornish Classics" **PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES** and **THE REPTILE**, we start with scientists Dr Morley (Maurice Denham), Dr Jack Costain (John Saxon) and Ann Barlow (Patricia Haines) examining a small orb which has descended from the sky ("guided down with fantastic accuracy ... inhuman accuracy!"). Aided by geiger-counter equipped military (headed by John Carson), after forty minutes of science babble the film shifts to a much darker tone, as the sphere transports a shadowy alien with a rubbery claw from Jupiter's third moon, who kidnaps nubile Earth women for repopulation.



This agenda driven alien - named Medra - opens a small business (Orion Enterprises) and lures breeding stock by placing a classified ad in *Bikini Girl* magazine. The creaking narrative is further undermined by Medra's final speech, promising that all victims will not be harmed (tell this to Ann, who has been slashed and strangled in a sleazy second-hand bookstore). Based on a novel by Frank Crisp, the notion of an alien invader needing to advertise in a jazz mag, rather than using scientific superiority to reach its goal, is fittingly delirious. Yet the excellent cast keep things watchable, including a priceless scene with Warren Mitchell and Marianne Stowe as worried parents.

TEENAGERS BATTLE THE THING

(US, 1958, Etiwanda, 58 mins)

This numbing proto-Bigfoot takes place in the ancient Indian burial grounds of Ivanpah, California, where the group discovers the tomb of a mummy (with a papier mache mask and cardboard fangs). The unfortunately named Dr Bill Wyman (Bill Simonsen) enlists teacher Roger Mason (director Dave Flocker) and five of his students for the outing. When the mummy comes back to life and kills, Mason, the teenagers and the sheriff plan to lure the creature into gasoline-soaked hay bails using meat scraps. But when this fails, a flare gun is a handy alternative.

Made under the title **IVANPAH**, this picture was never released outside the filmmaker's hometown of Upland. Like most American monster movies with teenagers they all look well into their twenties, and there certainly isn't any sign of legitimate archaeological procedures (the mummy is just uplifted to a shed).

Flocker directed under the pseudonym Don Fields, and it was written by his brother James T. Flocker. But it was James that went on to some kind of directing career, helming genre fare such as **GHOSTS THAT STILL WALK** and **THE ALIEN ENCOUNTERS**. James also served a seven year prison sentence for distribution of child pornography.



Dave Flocker reprised his Roger Mason role for the 1975 TV movie **CURSE OF BIGFOOT**, which repackaged the whole of **TEENAGERS BATTLE THE THING** as its last hour. This generous flashback is set up with a class lecture on mythical beasts, and in the 1970s Bigfoot craze, it seemed that even a bargain-bin mummy could pass as interest.

THE GEEK

(US, 1971, Brutus, 44 mins)



The Supernatural 1970s took Bigfoot to heart. Strongly associated with the Pacific Northwest, this fusion of Native American and European wild man folklore could usually be dismissed as either misidentification or rather obvious-looking hoaxes.

Allegedly filmed in Oregon, Washington and Alberta, Canada, **THE GEEK** is a Bigfoot porno that opens with some sombre but meandering narration, where the viewer is made aware that they will witness something "part man, but mostly beast." Against the backdrop of a sweeping outdoors score, we see six hippies get out of their VW and start hiking in the expansive forests. Their objective is to locate and photograph The Geek, a team effort which, as the narrator points out, means sharing even the women.

After two insipid sex scenes - newlyweds making love by a tree, and a tent sequence where the man admits to being a virgin whose only previous sexual experience was touching his sister's breasts - the expedition discovers a footprint. Two bestial rapes later, the males are defeated by The Geek in what you could generously call a fist fight. Escaping the ordeal, the team vow to return and take revenge on "that filthy animal."

All cast and crew go uncredited, though the star turn comes from Nora Wieternik, a 1970s skin flick regular most famous for her role as Queen Amora in the riotous **FLESH GORDON**. Ultimately **THE GEEK** is a tiresome mix of home movie and naturist exploitation, with a creature suit that just about maintains the standards of your average Bigfoot footage fakery.

THE BLOOD BEAST TERROR

(GB, 1966, Tigon, 88 mins)

Together with Japan's Mothra, the creature of **THE BLOOD BEAST TERROR** is part of a pretty exclusive club of Lepidoptera-related monsters. Directed by



Vernon Sewell, the film was described by Peter Cushing as perhaps the worst film he ever made (Cushing's stoicism included re-writing by the actor himself). Two murders

have left the police perplexed, with the only witness insane and several petal-like scales left at the scene. Inspector Quennell (Cushing) is drawn to the house of entomologist Doctor Mallinger (Robert Flemyng, replacing Basil Rathbone after his fatal heart attack two weeks before principal photography). When a further slaying implicates Mallinger and his daughter Clare (Wanda Ventham) the couple flee, but Quennell traces them and - together with daughter Meg (Vanessa Howard) - travels to a remote fishing village. It is discovered that Mallinger has created a Death's Head moth/female human hybrid, which drinks blood and kills when sexually aroused.

This erratically-edited programmer suffers from a formulaic script by Peter Bryan (though there is a bizarre amateur theatrics sequence), threadbare special effects, and alleged comic relief (Roy Hudd's mugging mortuary attendant enjoys eating lunch among the corpses). In America, distributor Pacemaker re-christened the film **THE VAMPIRE-BEAST CRAVES BLOOD**, followed by even more deranged hyperbole by the publicity department: "a ravishing Psycho-Field with diabolical power to turn into a Giant Death Head Vampire, to feast on the blood of her lovers before clawing them to death."

THE VULTURE

(Canada/GB/US, 1966, Homeric/Iliad, 91 mins)

"Half man, half beastbird ... swooping on his human prey ... drinking blood ... mutilating flesh!" **THE VULTURE** pulls in so many disparate elements, it still fails to generate any interest: rural murder mystery, cutting-edge science fiction, and family curses from beyond the grave are all mashed into banality. Glimpsed only as a pair of legs and talons, the titular menace is only fleetingly fleshed out in the climax, with the wings and balding head of delusional Professor Koniglich (Akim Tamiroff).

Set in Tolferro, Cornwall, the film begins with school teacher Ellen West (Annette Carell) taking a shortcut through a cemetery, who witnesses a bird creature fly out of the coffin of 17th century sorcerer Francis Real. Legend states that Real cursed the Stroud family for burying him alive and murdering his vulture, which was also contained in the casket together with some gold coins. While modern heir Brian Stroud (Broderick Crawford) dismisses the supernatural punishment, his niece Trudy (Diane Clare) and her American scientist husband Eric (Robert Hutton) are more open-minded. And with good reason: transmutative technology has been used to teleport into the grave, molecules becoming mixed with the remains of the warlock's beloved pet.



In this war between science and superstition Koniglich is obviously the villain from the start, with his Germanic accent and black cape. Similar to **THE WOMAN EATER**, **THE VULTURE** is also strangely out of time, having more in common with 1940s Poverty Row terrors and creature features of the 1950s. Furthermore, the stilted drawing-room chatter, static performances and fixed camera would be more at home on stage.

HOWLING II

(US, 1985, Hemdale, 87 mins)



Philippe Mora's **HOWLING II** sees Sybil Danning as werewolf queen Stirba, "mother of all harlots and all abomination of the Earth." Christopher Lee, Reb Brown and Annie McEnroe play a beleaguered trio aiming to stop the werewolf apocalypse in the tenth millennium since Stirba's birth.

Danning found her niche in B movies with strong characters and an insatiable lust, who also specialised in memorable outfits; any red-blooded male growing up in the 1980s will particularly remember her as St Exmin in **BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS** and as the alien queen in **THE PHANTOM EMPIRE**. Her notable costumes continue in **HOWLING II** with stunning leather and gold throne room wear, but memorable for the wrong reasons is a fur body suit for the amorous werewolf scenes. The actress supplied one topless shot on the insistence of the producers, which she was dismayed to see repeated seventeen times during the end credits.

Amongst the hairy threesomes and orgies, Mora's blasphemous sequel to Joe Dante's cult favourite is a camp train wreck more akin to vampire folklore and mysticism, acting as neither a foundation or inspiration for subsequent entries in the franchise (many of the cast and crew have grown ashamed of any involvement). Its endless sudden insert cuts of emerging claws and gnashing teeth attempt to hide a major setback: the production was supplied with ape rather than werewolf suits, where the pieces from the **PLANET OF THE APES** television series had to be covered with extra fur.

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON XXX

(US, 2012, Smash, 134 mins)

John Landis' **AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON** initially wrong-footed audiences with its offbeat humour and groundbreaking special effects. Created by Rick Baker, his work won the inaugural make-up Oscar. It certainly played its role in the 1981 cinematic year of the werewolf, which also included **FULL MOON HIGH**, **WOLFEN** and **THE HOWLING**. In an era of the slasher, technical innovation and a shift to supernatural horror helped create these four very different takes on the werewolf legend.

Over thirty years later, Jim Power helms this hardcore porn parody, faithfully following the story and recreating SPFX sequences as best they could. Richie Calhoun makes for a reasonable David Naughton substitute as the cursed David Kessler, with an added tweak of a constant boner after the werewolf attack. However, Dane Cross is less successful as Griffin Dunne/Jack Goodman, often tripping over his dialogue.

The most memorable aspect are the surreal masks worn by the lesbian Nazi dream demons, facades that are generally unnerving. They are certainly more successful than the main transformation attempt, where Kessler resembles an exceptionally heavyweight Kodiak bear.



For an American concern there is plenty of UK interest, and even some actual location shooting. Newcastle-born Lexi Ward takes on the Jenny Agutter/Nurse Price role, while the spectacular figure of Sophie Dee as Nurse Gallagher will keep you distracted from her thick Welsh accent.

RAWHEAD REX

(GB, 1986, Alpine/Green Man, 89 mins)

Adapted from his own short story and subsequently disowned by Clive Barker, **RAWHEAD REX** opens with farmers unwittingly releasing a hulking pagan demon onto a small Irish populace. Meanwhile, while researching religious artefacts, Howard Hallenbeck (David Dukes) encounters unhinged verger Declan O'Brien (Ronan Wilmot). After a caravan park rampage, the monster kills Hallenbeck's son Robbie (Hugh O'Connor), and it transpires that a fertility symbol from the altar is the only weapon against the beast. Even though the piece needs a female to set in motion its true power - enter Hallenbeck's wife Elaine (Kelly Piper) - Howard feels some kind of masculinity needs to be restored by hitting Rawhead with a shovel.



The chemistry between the American Hallenbecks is virtually non-existent (particularly as their two children sound Irish), and Wilmot gives one of the most unintentionally hilarious performances in genre history (this foul-mouthed church official is even baptised by Rawhead's urination). Rex himself (originally to be played by Peter Mayhew) is reduced to one of cinema's goofiest creatures, far from the unnerving sexual predator of Barker's twisted original tale. Transformed into a mighty mullet monster, the actor - Heinrich von Schellendorf - had to constantly tilt his head in the one-piece mask, as to see through the mouth. Rawhead unconvincingly trashes kitchens and caravans, but can successfully possess Inspector Gissing (Niall O'Brien), and pull a hysterical maiden through a window and out of her dress in one handy movement.

PAGANINI HORROR

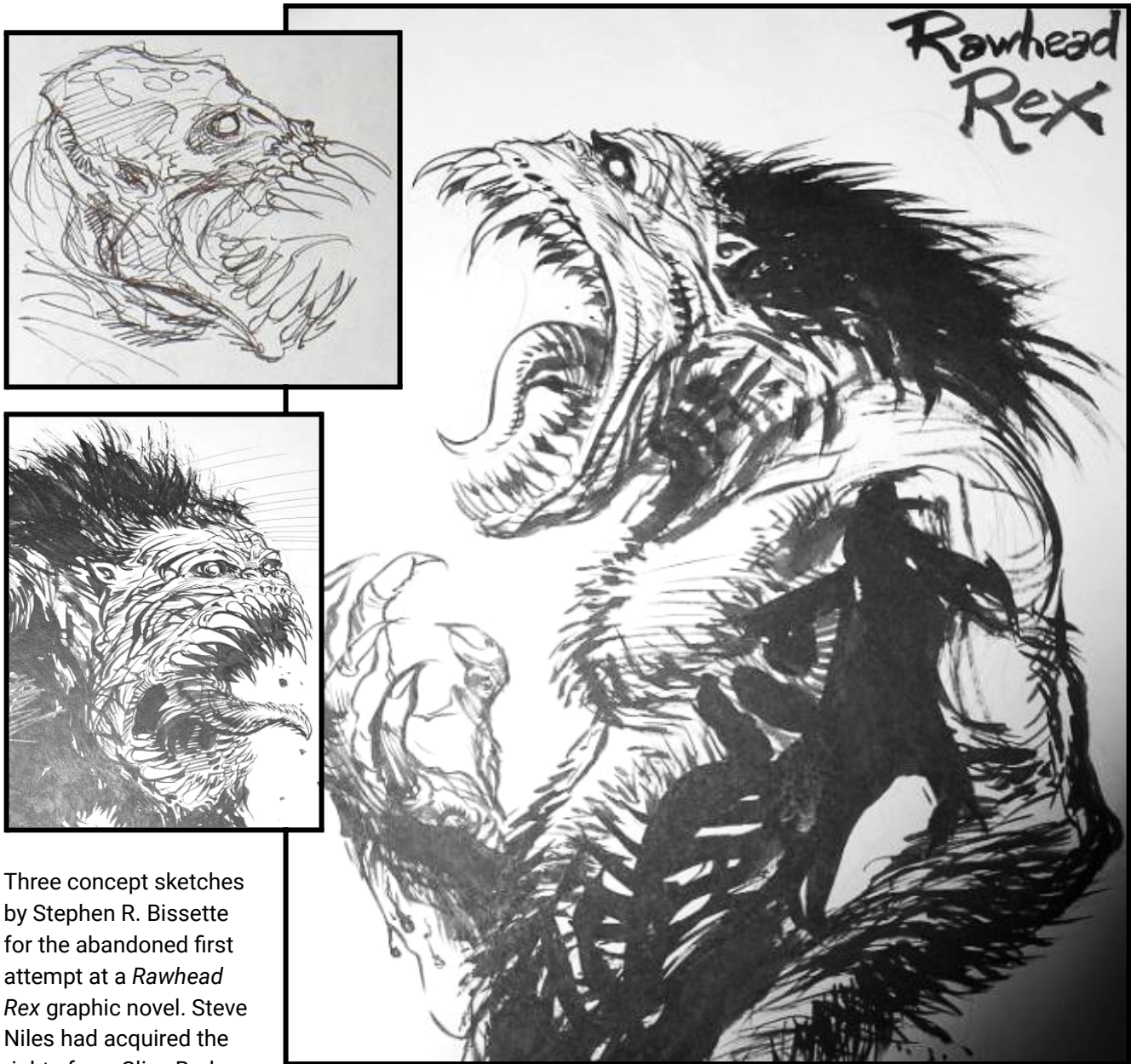
(Italy, 1989, Fulvia, 82 mins)



Born in 1782, Genoan Niccolò Paganini is considered one of the greatest violinists of all time, but did he sell his soul to the devil for this gift? Luigi Cozzi's **PAGANINI HORROR** follows director Mark Singer (Pietro Genuardi) - who is described not only as a genius, but a talented genius - hired to make a rock video in the Venetian villa where the violinist reportedly sold his soul for fame and fortune. The villa is owned by Sylvia Hackett (co-scriptwriter Daria Nicolodi), and the predominantly female band perform the song Paganini Horror based on unpublished music acquired from the mysterious Mr Pickett (Donald Pleasence). As filming starts, the virtuoso's ghost begins a murder spree, as the property becomes a supernatural annex where "time and space no longer have any meaning."

Released in Italy as **THE KILLING VIOLIN**, and produced on the thin premise that the same year's **PAGANINI** - Klaus Kinski's sex-fuelled pet project - would be a major box office draw, you have to feel for the director here, struggling with a hastily re-written script, sudden budget cuts and atrocious performances. Although dubbed, at least Donald Pleasence makes for a whimsical satan, chanting "little demons, little demons" as he throws money off the top of a high-rise apartment (acting as a metaphor for the movie itself).

Cozzi strives for a similar time distortion explored in Italian classics such as **INFERNO** and **THE BEYOND**, but without any guiding vision. Certainly such a low budget could not hope to entertain a plot that attempts to correlate music, mathematics, magic and murder.



Three concept sketches by Stephen R. Bissette for the abandoned first attempt at a *Rawhead Rex* graphic novel. Steve Niles had acquired the rights from Clive Barker

to adapt the short story for Steve's fledgling Arcane Press, and in 1989 pitched to artists Bissette and Michael Zulli. With Arcane already in financial difficulty, Bissette offered to initially bankroll and serialise the project via his own anthology, *Taboo*, a plan backed by Zulli and Barker. Having broken down layouts and consulted with Barker over some minor changes (necessary to the adaptation of the story from text to a visual storytelling medium) - slight narrative alterations Barker accepted and agreed to - the artists were then told by Niles that Eclipse had acquired the rights to adaptations of the *Books of Blood* stories, that Arcane was going under, and Niles was going to work for Eclipse Comics.

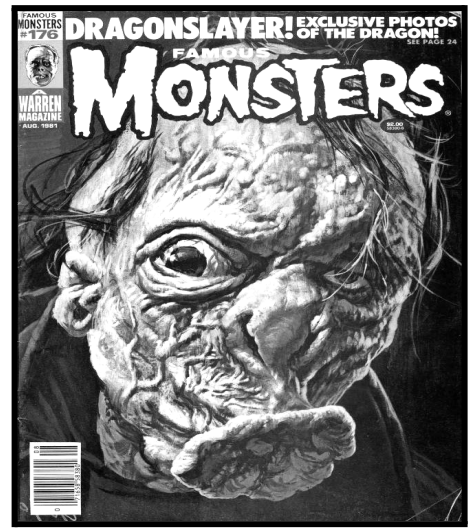
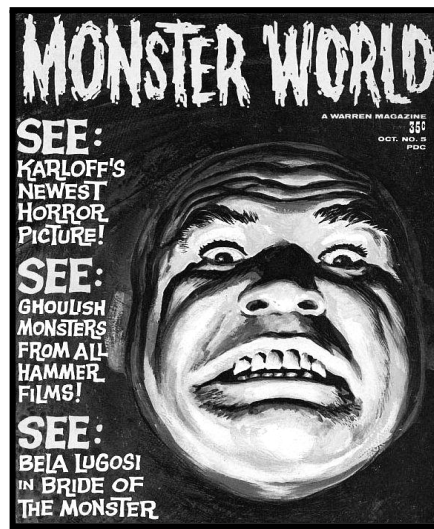
Bissette and Zulli rejected the proposition, in part due to the manner in which Eclipse presumed instant proprietorship of the adaptation (as Zulli said at the time, "we aren't baseball players, to be traded between teams," and Bissette's *Taboo* certainly wasn't going to fund the serialisation so that Eclipse ended up with the graphic novel). It was clear that Eclipse completely misunderstood (and loathed) horror as a genre, despite it being a marketable commodity. Furthermore, as affirmed via a single phone conversation between Bissette and Eclipse co-founder Dean Mullaney, Eclipse clearly wasn't comfortable with the vigour of Bissette and Zulli's concepts (or, in fact, with the content of Barker's 'go-for-broke' aesthetic).



Niles, Bissette, and Zulli jointly announced the termination of the project and the planned *Taboo* serialisation in late July of 1990. In 1993, Eclipse finally published a graphic novel version, adapted by Niles with Les Edwards and Hector Gomez artwork. Eclipse themselves filed for bankruptcy in 1995.

Appearing in the third volume of *Books of Blood*, Clive Barker described the monster on the printed page as a nine-foot tall walking phallus with a face like raw meat (hence his name), "huge, like the harvest moon," and a large mouth with very sharp teeth ("it seemed to split the head in two as it opened"). Some interpret Rawhead's phallic

appearance as him symbolising masculine aggression, or likely a representation of the male sex drive to its absolute worst and most horrific extreme. The Eclipse graphic novel, faithful to this notion, further characterises Rex's appearance by making him lanky and blue, as shown above, whereas Bissette went for the more conventional but nevertheless effective approach. In the short story and graphic novel, Rex only decides not to kill a woman because she is on her period (or the "blood cycle"), which sickens him, as do pregnant women (which is touched upon but left unexplained in the film). Otherwise, he has no issues killing or raping them.



Three magazines from yesteryear. **RAWHEAD REX** is the cover star ("Clive Barker's bloodbeast chews 'em up!") for *Fangoria* #61 (February 1987). Gray Morrow art of Tor Johnson as **THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS** for *Monster World* #5 (October 1965). *Monster World* was Warren's short-lived sister magazine to *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, spanning ten issues between November 1964 and September 1966. The magazine also has an even more intrinsic link to *Famous Monsters*: in a "race" to get to Forry Ackerman's hundredth issue, Warren skipped over *Famous Monsters* numbers 70-79 and incorporated *Monster World* numbers 1-10 as the missing issues. And this is where we came in: previously unpublished Basil Gogos painting of **THE MUTATIONS** for *Famous Monsters of Filmland* #176 (August 1981), seven years after the film's original release. It was one of a handful of covers used in the final years of *Famous Monsters* that didn't use photographs of science fantasy hits of the day.